

William G. Riley Sr. interviewed by Jaime Lopez and Setare Arashloo

- Jaime: Make sure we're rocking and rolling. All right, we should be good. So this gentleman right here that's joining me today is William G Riley. I know him as Bill Riley, and he was a shop steward on my, I think it was my second job in the business.
- Bill Riley: Yes.
- Jaime: So I must have been a second year apprentice, or maybe even a first year apprentice.
- Bill Riley: No, you were ... When I met you, you were third year.
- Jaime: I was a third year apprentice.
- Bill Riley: Going into your fourth.
- Jaime: Okay.
- Bill Riley: But [00:00:30] I thought you were a journeyman.
- Jaime: Very good. So, uh, Bill Riley has been a mentor to me and a great friend, great ally, and I'm so proud to have him here with me and participating in this project. So I'm just going to ask you some questions, and answer them at your will. Spent time, as much time as you want, answering questions, or explain them as much as you would like to, okay?
- Bill Riley: Okay.
- Jaime: So, uh, please tell us your name and your job title and where you [00:01:00] live.
- Bill Riley: My name is William G Riley Sr. I am a journeyman. I am currently working as a maintenance electrician for the New York Mets at City Field. Also I am an elected officer of local union number three. I serve as an [00:01:30] examining board officer of the local, along with Tom [Herron 00:01:35] and [Sid Stella 00:01:36] for [inaudible 00:01:37], and I've been in that position for nine years now. I will be re-elected this coming Saturday, the 20th of May, as I've been nominated and I'm running unopposed at this time.
- Jaime: Very good. And where is it that you're living now?
- Bill Riley: I live in [00:02:00] Electchester, the famous Electchester, and I've been in this area over 54 years now. I grew up across the street from Electchester in the public housing, which is Pomonok housing, but is ironic that I work for local union number [00:02:30] three, and my living arrangements were made possible by local three, because Harry Van Arsdale bought parcels of land in the 1950s and he was planning on building a development to help ease the burden on the apprentices and young journeymen and journeywomen starting their families with exorbitant [00:03:00] rent and costs of

housing. So he developed this community to reduce the burden of the rents and the everyday cost of living in that area.

But to get that, he had to sell part of the parcel, and at that time, they were in the midst of planning public housing for middle income families in this city. And he sold his [00:03:30] plot to have a development built called Pomonok Houses. So I grew up there, moved away for a little while, came back and reside there now, with my family.

Jaime: And can you tell us about your background? Where were you born, where were your parents born?

Bill Riley: Well, I'm the first son of Willie Riley and Beverley Riley. [00:04:00] My father was born in Santee, South Carolina. My mother was born in Connecticut, Stamford, Connecticut. They met somewhere early in life, and throughout their lives have lived above each other or below each other, in some kind of way, in some kind of city, since they were eight years old. And they have been together since that time, and [00:04:30] will be celebrating, they just celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary. So I'm their first born. We grew up in Pomonok. I'm the son of union working parents. My father was Teamster's local three bakery and confectionary workers' union. He [00:05:00] was one of the first African-Americans to be able to bake bagels anywhere in the world. My mother was a member of Pan Am's union, before they folded, and she also worked for the public library as a union worker.

And so I knew the plight and the struggles of working families [00:05:30] early on. I walked my first picket line, I think, when I was three or four years old. I was raised to be an activist, by my parents. People talk about my personality and my determination in seeing wrongs righted, or people who are being taken advantage [00:06:00] of helped up, and I was always taught, if it's not right, fix it, and you can't wait on others to do what you have to do for yourself.

So that's the character and the way I conducted myself for 38 years in this business. There was no door that was ever closed that I did not [00:06:30] open or blow up to get in. There's no "no" in my vocabulary, and I've taken every class that they have to offer to make myself marketable to feed my family.

Jaime: And, Billy, what other jobs have you had before the industry and throughout the industry?

Bill Riley: Well, my background, I was in school [00:07:00] for accounting. I wanted to be a Business major, and I was heading that way, but as most young men, you know, going to college and having freedom, I was not as disciplined, but I also found out I didn't like being locked in a cage. And the one thing about working in construction that drew me was [00:07:30] the fact that I worked all over the city. I can say all over this country, 'cause I volunteer once a year to do electrical work in some city Martin Luther King weekend, and so ...

Jaime: And what other jobs have you had in the industry?

Bill Riley: So, I was working as an accountant, [00:08:00] I worked as a porter. My first job was delivering newspapers for the Long Island Press. 1960 something. Mostly, uh, no, 1972, 'cause I was 14. About that. But I also worked as a porter, [00:08:30] security. I worked as a [inaudible 00:08:34] councilor. I work in my uncle's restaurant in Manhattan. We had a restaurant when I was growing up. Then I moved on and worked for a manufacturers, Hannover Trust, for a couple of years, and I was blessed to be [00:09:00] with a friend who was going to wait online to become a local three electrician. And the funny part about it is I lived across the street all my life and didn't know they were local three electricians. I knew they were construction workers, I played ball against them. Seen them all my life. So I went online and I was blessed after four days and three ... [00:09:30] Four days and three nights, or four nights and three days online, waiting for an application. And I was blessed to get in, and my life has not been the same since.

Jaime: Very good. And throughout your industry ... Well, let me ask you another question, before we go throughout your career. Uh, do you remember your first day on the job?

Bill Riley: Yes, I do.

Jaime: Can you tell me about it?

Bill Riley: My first day [00:10:00] I was ... It was funny, because I was working for manufacturers, and I had taken the exam to become a correction officer, and passed, and was in the process of being vetted. And I was asked in the local if I can ... 'cause they call on the Tuesday. The local called me on the Thursday. The Tuesday call said be here in [00:10:30] a week, the Thursday call, local three, said be here Wednesday. And I said "I need to give my job two weeks' notice," the lady says "Sir. If you're not here Wednesday, don't bother calling Thursday, 'cause I've got a thousand people who are waiting for your spot."

So I took the job, and first day, I came with my tool box, but the job was a mile from [00:11:00] my house, Jamaica Avenue. So you have to pitch up, 'cause at that time, I go to the avenue on the bus, I'm walking, I see another guy with a tool bag. And he's looking at me, I'm looking at him. His name is Al Robles. We're friends to this day. First day in the business, we walk into a roller skating rink, 'cause at that time, in the late 70s, early 80s was the roller skating [00:11:30] craze that had gotten a reboot. So I was happy, 'cause I was a skater. I mean, a skater. I did tricks, jumps, flips, splits and dance everything. So I had my skates ready to go on this floor.

Jaime: So you were going to build the roller skating rink?

Bill Riley: And be the first person to be on the floor! But what happened, we were not experienced [00:12:00] enough, because at that time they were doing all the control works and tying everything in, and he needed somebody with experience. So the next day, we were ceremoniously laid off. So I found out, day one, you can get a job and you can lose a job, in one day. So that was my first job, but I've had the pleasure, I mean, I've done all types of work in this industry, and each [00:12:30] one is more delightful than another, more challenging than the next, more intricate, and the feeling

that you get when you're working to build something, and this is why I decided not to become an electrician, because ...

When I work, I want to see the product. When I come into a room and I install lights, fixtures, [00:13:00] devices, when I hit the switch and I leave, I see it. It's readily visible to me. I see the fruits of my labor, and I like doing that. I like teaching people what I do, and so that part of it was more beneficial to me, to work with my hands and not be in, when a job gets too much for me and I'm [00:13:30] tired of it, I usually get transferred, or I might get laid off, and go to another job. So I've always had that in mind. Working with my hands, seeing what I do and being in different places on any given moment. The most jobs I've worked in one day was three.

Jaime: Three jobs in one day?

Bill Riley: Three jobs in one day. I work on a job, was called to [00:14:00] do some overtime on another job, then I got called on an emergency somewhere else, on the same day.

Jaime: And it's uncommon right, but different types of work as well?

Bill Riley: Yes, because I'm versed in every facet of electrical. There's nothing in electrical I have not done or have not been trained in.

Jaime: So [00:14:30] could you tell us a little bit about the training?

Bill Riley: The first thing I did was take the high voltage theory, and the high voltage splicing, and it was a fluke because I got my A card and I filled out the application in the union room, and I got a letter saying I was in the class. Didn't know what the class entailed, what was expected, [00:15:00] and I started taking it. And it's another apprenticeship. It took three years. It's a minimum of two years, but we moved school locations in the middle, so I was there a little longer. But that training was exceptional. I was trained in fiber optics. I was trained [00:15:30] in communication, teledata. I do services, I do new construction on apartments, commercial buildings. I've done so much in this industry that, you know, people used to call me Poindexter. When I came in, that's what they [00:16:00] call me, Poindexter. "Yo Poindexter, what are you taking today?" But the thing about this industry, it's fleeting. 'cause you have to be marketable. More so now than ever. So I was taught to make myself marketable, so I can feed my family, whatever happened. So I took every class, and all I had to do was invest.

The splices class [00:16:30] was 5000 a semester, or better. All I had to do was show up, no money out of my pocket. This local has trained me to feed my family, anywhere I want, and so I was blessed to have it that I could get out. I do welding, I was trained as a welder, and that was funny, 'cause, you know, I wasn't supposed to be in that [00:17:00] class, and somebody didn't show up, and I snuck in and they said "You're not in the class," I said "Well, the person who's seat I'm in isn't in the class either, so either put their name next to mine or mine next to theirs, but I'm not leaving the class," and that turned out to be good. I was able to receive calls to do that. But I like the splicing, high

voltage splicing more. I've worked on [00:17:30] many transmission lines, from Yonkers to Manhattan, into ... From Yonkers to the Bronx into Manhattan.

That was a great job. 2ml cable, and when you're a splicer, what you're doing is you're cutting a cable, you're opening it up to the conductor, and you're building it back up properly [00:18:00] with the insulation and the things that will keep it from failing, when you introduce a voltage. So I've been doing that, and I was one of the very few of color, when I started, to go out. 'cause people have taken the class, but they all didn't get out, and that's why I say there are doors that have been closed, but I'll always manage to find a key, [00:18:30] or crack in the door, or the window that was left open for me to get the training. And once I got there, I was accepted as a splicer, and I worked on the World Trade Center [bombing 00:18:50], the original one, in 1994, and I did building rises at that time, and then I worked on the new [00:19:00] World Trade after the bombing and the towers fell. So I worked there doing that.

I worked on the rebuilding of 7 World Trade as well, so I've been all over. I've been a steward for ... I've been in the industry 37 years. I've been a steward for almost 20 of the 37, on a job somewhere or other.

Jaime: So I would like [00:19:30] to hear more about your responsibilities as a shop steward, but before we pass over, can we touch base on the high voltage splicing a little bit, because a lot of people who are listening to this interview may not understand? Maybe we could try to explain it visual, what the size of that 2ml cable is, and how those layers, if you could maybe just explain a little bit about how representative in size or texture?

Bill Riley: Well, [00:20:00] the conductor itself is a series of strands or wires that are meshed together, wound together, and as it gets bigger, the capacity to [inaudible 00:20:15] voltage and run amperes in increased. So a 2ml cable is about 3 inches thick, in size, and you have an outer jacket, then you have [00:20:30] another layer that has the grounds running through it, and then you have a layer underneath that, which has to be stripped. And it's a certain distance for all the openings, according to the voltage that you are going to introduce to it. So for every 5kV, you have to skin it 5 inches.

Jaime: So for every 5000 [00:21:00] volts?

Bill Riley: You've got to open that [outer 00:21:02] jacket, that much. So it's a design. You get a print, and it tells you what they want in that splice. So you have to tape it, you have to break it down, open up, take the semiconductor, 'cause you have the insulation, semiconductor, so there's a series of layers, and each one has to be [00:21:30] replaced. So when we replace it, it's better than what it was before, at that point, if you do it right.

Jaime: And this ... I have the inside information that splicers, it's almost like a small family within a family, that you guys have a certain type of community. Can you tell us a little bit about those relationships that you've built with those other brothers and sisters?

Bill Riley: Well, as far as splicing, it is one of the last bastions [00:22:00] of brotherhood and sisterhood, because we took the mindset that we splice but we're all the same. So

whatever the hours, we split them. So if there's a day crew and a night crew, and it's a 24 hour operation, we split it in half, seven hours of straight time and five hours of overtime, but the industry standard is if you work [00:22:30] nighttime, you get time and a half for your work, the whole shift. So we say we didn't want to have that animosity, so we made sure everybody made the same amount of money, and that's something you don't hear on jobs. Guys fight over who's working, why he's working, I'm not working, I wanted to work this weekend, and we cut all of that out.

This is what we do. We have [00:23:00] a group that I just left, upstairs, they have a class that's taking place right now, and you know, we have a camaraderie. We fight, we bicker, but for the most part, we have each other's back, and whatever happens, the first time I saw the love, my father broke his leg. Two guys fighting [00:23:30] on the job. He was at the oven, and they were playing and fell and broke his ankle, when they fell on him.

Jaime: What is the oven?

Bill Riley: Uh, baker's oven, so ... He was a bagel baker, as well as a maker and a [inaudible 00:23:45]. So he was at the oven, loading his bagels, and they fell and broke his ankle. You know what I'm saying? So ... And they sent a basket [00:24:00] to him, so he calls me "Son, you know these guys? Somebody sent me some fruit, and he said something about splicing." I said "You got a basket?" He said "Yeah!" I said "That's the splicers," "Who's the splicers?" "That's the guys I work with. They heard you were hurt, and they wanted to send something." And they sent a thank you letter to them, 'cause they felt ... They knew that the family was thought of, [00:24:30] that we looked out for each other. Good times, bad times, we look out for each other, and that carries over on the job, most of the time. But I try to bring that into general population of local three, because you spend more time working than you do with your family, most of [00:25:00] the time.

So if you can't have peace and harmony and a collective thought that we're working for the same aim, it makes the day miserable. It makes it hard to come to work every day. And that's something I've felt strongly about. Nobody should have to come to work and feel miserable, because somebody's treating [00:25:30] them adversely or not with respect. So I bring that.

Jaime: So you said you were a shop steward for over 20 years?

Bill Riley: Yeah, give or take, you know? In between.

Jaime: So can you tell us about the responsibilities of a shop steward? 'cause I know that electricians, they know when a shop steward comes to them and cards them and asks them to produce information about the job and job conditions, but can you [00:26:00] explain further what a shop steward does, their official responsibilities and also some of the responsibilities that you take upon yourself?

Bill Riley: So, as a shop steward, you are placed on the job to represent the business manager, because the business manager is represented by a business representative, and I am representing him on the job daily. My job is to [00:26:30] make sure that the men and women who represent local three adhere to the contract that was signed by local three, and the rules and laws governing our way of work, as well as to make sure that the contractor lives up to his portion of the contract, and that he does not try to take advantage of or remove parts of the contract as he pleases, [00:27:00] to do his work. So there's a standard of operations in New York City, and we are there to enforce that. So we work with men and women to understand what they're there for, make sure that they're being treated with respect and that they understand that it's a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. That you can't come here [00:27:30] and just walk this job and not work. You might not be able to do what I do in running pipe, you might be better at circuitry or doing something else, but you can't come and collect what I collect, 'cause if you just do that, then what I collect is going to be less, 'cause you're going to undermine my standard of living.

So I'm there to make sure that they understand that we're here to work. I was [00:28:00] taught early by a foreman I had, my first [A 00:28:06] job. His name was Thomas Baker. I love him to death. And he told me that we were here to do a job, but nobody said we couldn't have fun while we did it, and he taught me how to have fun at work, be safe, be productive. And that crew that worked for him would run though [00:28:30] the wall and not stop until he said come back, 'cause that's the love and respect we had for him as a foreman. So like I said, we try to make sure that you're working in a safe environment, because what has happened in the trades, especially since the late 70s, mid 80s and 90s, we have stepped [00:29:00] up the pace of the jobs, is a fast track, and we have not been able to train apprentices on the jobs like we are supposed to, because without that training, they're lost. They are missing something. So they have to be taught. That's what the apprenticeship is. You're being taught a trade, and you have [00:29:30] to learn that trade through repetition and mastery. And if you're not given that, you will have a worker who is not complete.

So we try to make sure that you're learning as an apprentice. And you would know, because when I met you, first thing that impressed me was the manner in which you carried yourself. Your [00:30:00] mode of dress was even different, and that's why I thought you were a journeyman. And when you said you were a fourth year, I said "Apprentice?!" And I adopted you right then. That was 145th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, and to see where you are now just makes me beam, because I have a lot of mentees, [00:30:30] so I think.

'cause anybody I meet, I try to give them the benefit of what I was taught or what I know, and when I would talk to you, and you know we had some scary moments, 'cause you being a brother who is of Spanish descent, Puerto Rican, and me being an African-American, I tried to bring you into the Latimer, and they would question [00:31:00] why I didn't have a black mentee. I said "I have a lot of mentees, white, black, but he's my mentee, and I don't care if he's Spanish, but he should go to this club. He's going to that club as well,"

Jaime: Yes.



Bill Riley: "But he can join this club with me, and he's going to do that, and he's my mentee," so I adopted you and I watched you soar, you know? 'cause you get it, you understand what this is about, and that's what our purpose is [00:31:30] in life. To take what we know and give it to someone else, so they can incorporate it in their treasure chest and elevate to a higher level. You know? 'cause a lot of people don't want to see other people shine. They feel that there's something wrong with that. But I will never lose any luster because your star shines bright. Remember that.

Jaime: Thank you, brother.

Bill Riley: Never lose [00:32:00] any luster. The problem is we have people who don't want to help lift unless they're getting something. But God told me that I'm supposed to be about love and share, so that's what I do. So as a shop steward, you might be a social worker, at times.

Jaime: Yes.

Bill Riley: 'cause we deal with people in life. So all the things that happen are not on the [00:32:30] job. I've had people who've had children or wives or family members who've needed, had special needs, and when they went home, they didn't go to sleep, they went home to start the second job, to take care of that family member. And a lot of people didn't understand why people talk or don't talk, are not as friendly, [00:33:00] and when I spoke to the men, I found out what he was dealing with every day. And he said, you know, "I don't have a problem with people, but I have so much on my mind that I'm dealing with, trying to take care of my family. And I'm not trying to disrespect anybody," but nobody knew, 'cause they didn't talk to him. You know what I'm saying?

So we, as stewards, we try to make sure the job is [00:33:30] safe, comes in on time and the men and women of local three get the glory and the recognition that they deserve.

Jaime: And how did you navigate that situation, where this gentleman was telling you about his situation at home and some of his attitude at work, and so how did you navigate that scenario and that space and that energy?

Bill Riley: So, what I usually do, because information comes, and [00:34:00] when I got it, I went to the source, I went to the crew, and I started asking them what they thought about the man. And they were saying things that I asked them "Do you know anything about him? Did you know he has a disabled child at home that needs 24 hour care? Not some care, 24 hour care. Did you know that?" "No, I didn't know," because if you don't try to understand that [00:34:30] person, there's no reason to talk, you know? I have people who are from all over the world, and when they speak sometimes it's hard to understand them, 'cause they don't speak our language, they speak their language. And some people think this is America and you have to speak English. This is the world, and God said speak your language. If you want [00:35:00] to know what a person is about, you have to take the time. You can understand anybody if you take the time and you show the respect and care in that conversation. But he said "I don't understand, he doesn't talk English," you're never going to get anything.



So I always go direct to the source. I bring it out with love. Don't chastise anybody. [00:35:30] But I ask them "Supposing if you were in that situation, what do you think your attitude would be? Or your personality would be? Would you be talkative? Would you want to be coming in laughing and joking, knowing what you just left and what you have to go to?" So some of them understood, but we always have people who are special and they're never going to understand. And [00:36:00] that's not a problem. I don't have to go home with you. That's all.

Jaime: Has your work ever felt creative or artistic in nature? And if so, why?

Bill Riley: Yes. Definitely artistic, definitely creative, and as we sit in this building here, this training center, I worked [00:36:30] this job, I was a steward on this project when it was going up, and we have some intricate lighting systems. We have a Picasso lighting package that was installed, and it looks like an architectural wonder. So these are the things. Or when you get into a place where you have to mount something or install it in a place that is not accessible, [00:37:00] but it has to be there, and you have to create a way to get it in. And they don't want to know "It can't be done." You have to find out what it is. So every time we do a job, we are trained as electricians of local three to assess what had to be done. If we've never done it before, read and see what is entailed to put it up. We might have [00:37:30] a learning curve of one or two devices, but by the time we get to the third or fourth one, we're at the pace that it was estimated at, because everything you do, there is an estimated time attached to that project. And if you don't do it under or as close to that as possible, then your contractor is going to lose money. And if he loses money, he cannot get the next job.

[00:38:00] So the thing is a working relationship. I was taught when I first came in it was us against the contractors, and nothing could have been more incorrect than that, because local three has no jobs in the electrical field. They have contractors that they have an agreement with to hire local three electricians. [00:38:30] So we had to make sure that we represent local three in a proper manner. 'cause if not, where do you go? And as we see the environment where we are now, the corporations and the conservators of this country believe that working people should [00:39:00] not make a decent living, a salary where they can enjoy life. They have decided that they want the wages to drop back to what they were in 1950, 1960, you know? And they don't want to pay benefits. And we started, saw when Ronald Reagan came into office, the start of them shedding their responsibilities [00:39:30] to the working men and women in this country, which was to go and pull the pension funds, saying that they were bankrupt. Pan Am, Kodak Eastern, a couple of other companies, and then Bush came in and allowed them to pass their debt to the pension fund that's there for when companies go bankrupt [00:40:00] and they pay maybe a dollar, fifty cents on a dollar, I don't know what it is.

But they decided that they didn't want to pay us our fair share of what we produced, because working men and women give up salaries in their pocket for their benefits, for our pensions, for medical, and we are mired in a strike now with Spectrum, [00:40:30] who bought out Time Warner, who said we should not have a decent healthcare plan and want to pull their workers out of it and we can't allow that to happen. We cannot allow, when men and women who have built this country and continue to build this

country, to be left behind. We have corporations and rich people who are stealing the wealth [00:41:00] of this nation and they're blaming it on union workers. But the funny thing to me is they say that we are 11% of the workforce, that that means 11 out of 100 are union. That means that 89 are not, and don't have the benefit packages that we do, don't have the protections [00:41:30] that we do. But we are only a small percentage, so why are they spending billions of dollars to destroy us? So I think it's because we're got it right, and they've got it wrong.

But it's going to take a collective of the men and women who are going to see that they're going to have to stand and fight to keep [00:42:00] what they have. They're going to have to go back to the streets and fight for their standards of living. 'cause we have politicians who have turned their backs on the people, and have decided to go into business for themselves, and have left us out in the cold.

Jaime: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Bill, I want to know more about your journey and [00:42:30] your story and your health and your wellbeing in this business.

Bill Riley: This business takes a toll on you. We're inundated with environmental hazards, physical hazards, you know? Health issues like everyone else. In 2014, I suffered a stroke, [00:43:00] and as you see from my speech, it's noticeable sometimes when I talk. I was out two years. I returned to work, this was my first job, this training center was my first job back as an electrician, and I've been working now one year and four months, and I feel great. When I got sick, I told them I was coming back. They told me no. [00:43:30] I said "I'm coming back to work." When I was in the emergency room, I couldn't talk. I couldn't talk for three days. I started to regain my ability to speak, and ...

But the one thing about it, I had the stroke on the job. What was alarming was the lack of recognition that we have to some of the ailments [00:44:00] that we suffer. And as a steward, when we had safety meetings, I made sure to make the statement "If you have any illness, any injury, you're taking any medication, let the foreman know. Or at least let your partner know," 'cause if you get sick on the job and they come and they don't have a benchmark, they can be doing something to you that will hurt you not help you. But they [00:44:30] did not really understand, and it took me 20 minutes to get five people to understand that I was in trouble.

Jaime: Yeah.

Bill Riley: 'cause I couldn't talk, and I was trying to use sign language, but I was using the prayer sign to tell them I was hurt, and they didn't understand it. It [00:45:00] wasn't until the apprentice, Jared [Sturgess 00:45:05] walked past the door, and I just blurted out a noise, and he backed up and he said "Oh, Mr. Riley, how you doing?" I said "Ugh, ugh, ugh," and he walked towards me, but he felt out of place, because there were journeymen there and he was an apprentice, so he's going to tell them what to do! And he said "He needs an ambulance! Something's wrong [00:45:30] with him, he can't talk!" And he got on the phone. And that was 20 minutes. Four journeymen, and this apprentice was the one who came and recognized. But the alarming part was they were supposed to have a safety meeting to let everyone know some of the signs of stroke, and they didn't. And that bothered me. Because they told me it was going to happen.

But, [00:46:00] you know, I've been blessed to come through this injury free, mostly, in this business. 38 years, little knocks, you know? Drop something on your foot, you know? Cut your hand, you know? But that was a major injury, and most people don't come back. And I lost three people since my stroke who had strokes, so I know the severity of it. But I have a [00:46:30] determination and I know one thing, that God has blessed me, and when it's time to go, I'll go, but when I go, I'm going to be standing up, all right? I can be home, sitting in my chair, and pass away tonight, but I'm not going to live like I'm going to do that. I'm going to live like I'm living. When I go, I go.

But until that time, you know, I plan on [00:47:00] continuing to leave a mark on this world, that people understand that I'm a trade unionist who works on behalf of men and women, regardless of where they work, because a lot of people have the presence that their above people. You know, I'm an electrician, you're a sweeper, so I'm better than you. And [00:47:30] that could not be further from the truth, you know what I'm saying? So I treat people like I want to be treated, and that helps keep me healthy, you know what I'm saying? 'cause 2017, and I can't say it, 'cause I know it's tape, but all the a-holes are cut out of my life. I don't have time for trash, I don't have time for nonsense. If you're positive, you're doing something creative, I'm on board. Other [00:48:00] than that, I'll see you on the next go round, 'cause life is short.

Setare: I feel bad jumping in, 'cause I don't know which questions you asked, but if you can change one thing about your job, would what that be?

Bill Riley: The one thing I would change ... [00:48:30] There's a few things, if you look at it from the job point of view. The ... I would say when the jobs are being put together, there's no connectivity. There's like ... It's like they're running wild in 18 directions, and I'm trying to find a [00:49:00] word that would best describe the lack of direction sometimes, on jobs, you know? I'm in there to put an outlet in the wall, but the wall isn't built, you know? Or I'm there to rough out the outlet in the wall, but the walls are up, you know? So there's no ... Not continuity, there's another word ...

The other thing [00:49:30] would be inclusion, and that inclusion would be that we have all type of people in this industry now. Men, women, people from different nationalities, religions, you know, and it's a new day. People want to be respected for what they bring to the table, and they want to be able to [00:50:00] stand proudly in the group like everybody else, but the opportunity is not always there. We have contractors who, for some reason, think people of color might not be able to make money for them. So we're not given those opportunities as regularly, and that's something that's in every industry, everywhere in this world, you know? We're starting to see [00:50:30] a resurgence of racism or sexism or all different things to keep people out of groups. But there's only one group, and that's humanity. Harry Van Arsdale said "When are the people going to join the human race?" And that's because we're all human. There's one design. No different. Your body is no different from my body, from [00:51:00] his body. We're designed by a creator, and that means that I should be able to come and feed my family like anybody else who is employed.

And when I applied to be a foreman or a sub-foreman, or to be an engineer, or some other specialty, I should be given that opportunity. And I think until we get that

opportunity, the business is not [00:51:30] going to flourish like it should. We're always going to be short, because we are not using all our resources.

Setare: And can contractors like put something in their contracts or create a situation that works against this sort of inclusion?

Bill Riley: No, all they have to do is not hire you. [00:52:00] 'cause it's there. We have people who believe that local is the problem, but the local, I said, doesn't have a job. We send you to a contractor who has jobs. So the onus is directly on the contractor, who should realize that the world is changing, and when they were in the 50s, 40s, 50s, 60s, the number [00:52:30] of people of color, or the number of women, was minuscule, not that many, but now we have hundreds, thousands coming in, and we're going to be here, and they need to use us.

But the contractors are part and parcel to the problem, because they dictate who's going to be a foreman, a forewoman, or going to work on this job, or take that project, [00:53:00] and until they understand that they have to open up and accept, they're going to fall short.

Setare: Okay.

Jaime: What advice would you give someone starting day one in this field, in your field or job?

Bill Riley: It has not changed since I started. We're brothers and sisters like yourself. You're [00:53:30] in a business that you will be taught how to feed your family, and the more you educate yourself, the better you'll be able to feed your family, and that electricians are a dime a dozen. So you have to do whatever you need to to separate [00:54:00] yourself and elevate yourself on another level that you're usable. 'cause we're all usable, but you want to be on the right team. You want to be on the positive team that's going to give you the opportunities to show your talent. And if you don't have that, we'll teach you what you don't know. So I tell them "Never [00:54:30] accept no, if you want to do it." If you can't get the education there, get it elsewhere and come back there and use it, all right? Never sell yourself short, 'cause we all have things we can do, but we all are able to comprehend any directions and learning. So I might be [00:55:00] here, but I tell people "It's not where you start, it's where you end up." If you keep working to get to the top, even if you don't make it, you'll be so close that you'll be further advanced in the world, when you start, you know what I'm saying? So I say educate yourself, learn everything.

As an apprentice, make sure you look at the prints, every day, at what you did. [00:55:30] Make sure as an apprentice you ask the journeyman what is the purpose of what the installation is for that day, so you know, he's saying "I'm putting, I'm running this pipe to the next room," "Why are you running this to the next room?" "'cause we can't run it outside, we've got to be in this [chase 00:55:52], and once we get to the other side, we have to mount it on a wall. If you don't do it, we'll have a problem."

So he [00:56:00] has to teach you how to set up your work, you know? You can learn from anybody, even if it's the wrong thing. And one of them things I saw when I came in, everybody would say "Oh, he doesn't know what he's doing, he's this, he's that." No, just learning what he's doing. See what he's falling short at. So we used to test people and say "You've got to put clock outlet, second [00:56:30] floor, at a [inaudible 00:56:32] in the basement." "All right," and we watch you. Do you know what to do when you leave a room? You know what material do you have to go to the work area and assess? When you come back, what do you do?

We've seen guys or girls grab a drill, no extension cord, have to come back three stories to get the extension cord, [00:57:00] then get down there, found out they didn't have the bit. So got to come back up. Not good. Journeyman, seasoned journeyman, measure once, cut twice. So I take all my measurements that I can, when I go to the dreading machine or the bender, I'm bending up more than one piece. So I might look like I'm not working this fast, but once I get back to that area, I have 50 feet ready to install. [00:57:30] 100 feet ready to install, you know what I'm saying? 'cause that's how you set yourself up.

And you have to work in the morning. When you get to work, work. Don't wait and coast and take your time, 'cause something always happens in this industry. That wall was blank behind, but here there's concrete. You didn't know that, but you took your time starting [00:58:00] your job, and when you got to that point, it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and you hadn't finished. So what do you tell the boss, why you're not finished? You know what I'm saying?

So we're in the business where we work ourselves out of a job. Every day we work, we're working ourselves to the unemployment line, unless our contractor has another job to send us to. [00:58:30] That's the nature of our business. So we do it to the best of our ability, 'cause you are the first representation of local three that some of the people see when they come to that job. So your impression is an impression that's going to allow local three to come back and work for the customer or local three to be banned [00:59:00] by that customer, because of the way that you conducted yourself, or somebody in your crew. So you want to make sure that people want us.

Setare: [inaudible 00:59:12] have we had [inaudible 00:59:15]

Jaime: No, I have not.

Setare: Did you, have you ever passed a tool to someone, or have any tool passed on to you?

Bill Riley: Uh, yes. Yes, I've had [00:59:30] some good journeymen, and they would give you something. I've always looked out for apprentices. You know, if I had something, or I saw they needed something. And it's special. Like I had a guy retiring gave me some of his tools. It was special, you know, and you have something, you know, to remember. But I [01:00:00] leave them whatever I can. Most of its mental, you know? Mental stability, you know? Strengthening the character, making... 'cause this business is different, you know? We are inundated with all type of people in an area that's very

dangerous, and if you are not able to conduct yourself as a man or woman of integrity, you can be hurt on these jobs. [01:00:30] If you're not a person who has patience, is not volatile, you know? Doesn't know how to speak to people with respect, there are people who will meet you and be ready to take on whatever you bring, you know?

And that makes it hard on jobs, especially as a steward, because I had jobs where there were fights, you know? Clashes, you know? [01:01:00] And the thing about working, we are trying to feed our families, trying to make a better way, and you can't do anything if you are intimidated, you feel discriminated against, you feel that people might be picking on you. [01:01:30] You want to be able to come to work and be in an environment free from stress. The unnatural stress, 'cause there's always going to be stress. We can't get away from it. But the unnatural stress, the stress you don't bring on, that someone brings to you, that's the biggest part of it, you know? Making sure people understand it's not acceptable.

Jaime: [01:02:00] I have one more question for you, Billy. What inspires you?

Bill Riley: Wow. There are a few, there are a few. Right now, my granddaughter, Ariel Sophia. My daughter, Danielle Simone, who had to [01:02:30] stop school for a minute because she was having her daughter, and now is ready to go back to school, and my granddaughter's father is in actuarial science. So I'm inspired by their ability to start on that launch pad with their family and what they're trying to do in life. My son, who [01:03:00] left school, but he wanted to go into music, and I'm watching him become a creative genius before my eyes, and I gave him the opportunity to do this.

I told him he had two years from the date I talked to him. That was on his 20th birthday, and I told him he had two [01:03:30] years to make a success of himself in that industry, because the rent is due in two years. And I will pay for anything and everything. Any talent shows, any showcases, any trips, food, anything, as long as I see you doing that, and I'm inspired by that because I'm watching him. He's been to Japan, and he just got [01:04:00] invited back to do showcases in September, with them now paying all his expenses. So I was like "Wow," you know?

And I'm not really thrilled with all the language and content of the lyrics, you know? And we debate about that, you know? 'cause I tell him some of the words they're using are not endearing terms, you know? [01:04:30] 'cause when they were using the N-word, my ancestors were being brutalized, having their genitals eaten while they were hanging from trees, and people looked at them and had picnics and barbecues while they were being brutalized. And we have people now that use [01:05:00] the word nigger as if it's a badge of honor. But how do you say there's honor when your people were being destroyed? So that part of it we, you know, talk about, 'cause that's education.

You don't know a story, you can't understand a story, and unfortunately, [01:05:30] America has diluted the history of this country, when we can have an asshole like the doctor, the brain surgeon, what's his name, who ran for president? What's his name? He just ran for president, and Trump made him the head of housing. [HUD 01:05:58]. [01:06:00] He's the guy who said that African-Americans came here to make a better life for themselves, and for a person of color, to say that people bought over here in chains



on the bottom of boats being thrown into the ocean for shark bait, and brutalized for 400 years, [01:06:30] came here for a better life ... Unlike most immigrants, we did not chose to come here. We were forced to come here, and we've been fighting ever since, to have our say, and a say that ... In 2016, 17, they still are voting to give me my natural rights as a human being to vote [01:07:00] in this country. So that's why I try to impart in my son the importance of words and actions. And I see at 21, in two months, he understands a little, you know? 'cause he ... [01:07:30] He speaks his mind, and I'll always let him speak his mind, whether I agree or disagree. I'll never silence his voice.

I'm also inspired when I look at the fact that I'm coming to the finish of a journey that I started at 19 and I met so many, so many brilliant [01:08:00] people. So many good people. And I have been able to feed my family and be exposed to so many things. I've been blessed to represent the members of this local throughout the country and the world, 'cause I have gone to other countries to represent the local, and you know, just a young man from the projects, [01:08:30] growing up across the street from Electchester, jumping on the roofs, running through the buildings, getting chased out and now I'm one of the leaders of the greatest local in the world. And I say that not only proudly but factually, because we have something that most don't. Even [01:09:00] the times where it's rough, we come together. We stand together, and that would be the most inspiring thing, I think, that we have people who will not think it [robbery 01:09:17] to stand up for others.

Jaime: Well, thank you for your time and your words. Proud of you, buddy.

Bill Riley: [01:09:30] Love you, bro. Love you. And I can say, watching you, I know that it's going to be good, 'cause we have ...

Setare: Thank you so much.

Bill Riley: [inaudible 01:09:42] A pleasure, and ... You know